

Georgetown Council on Aging FY20 Annual Report

In our third year at the Georgetown Senior Community Center, increased participation continued to be evident in existing, new or expanded programs provided by the Georgetown Council on Aging. Along with the continued increase in participation, additional participants connected to the Council on Aging illustrated the success of strong programming in the first half of Fiscal Year 2020. During the first seven months of FY20, the COA saw a steady increase of 20-30 percent or participation in programs at the Senior Center. This continued trend in increased participation demonstrated the success the COA has had in deepening connections within the community. Highlights of the year included the addition of dance and fitness classes to the COA wellness program, a highly successful Health Fair, well-attended health education programs including a Savvy Caregiver and My Life My Health series. The Veteran's Services Director partnered with the COA to provide monthly office hours and Lunch and Learn Series allowed the congregate lunch program to expand with the bonus of additional community education. Additional social and recreation programs including a Women's Breakfast series, and Armchair Travel series all saw good participation with new participants joining the programs. After much thought and to reflect the evolvement of the COA's mission, the name of the COA newsletter was changed from "A Few Gray Hairs" to "Living Well Together."

In Fiscal Year 2020, board members and their positions included: Sue Clay Chair; Vice Chair; Darcy Norton, Secretary Jill Benas; Esther Palardy; Diane Prescott, Jean Perley, Diane Klibansky, Jeanne Robertson, Martha Lucius and as well as Alternate Board Members Carol Westhaver and Marie Collins. Council on Aging staff members in FY20 included Director Colleen Ranshaw-Fiorello, Outreach Worker Kirsten Klueber, Administrative Assistant Julie Pasquale, Van Driver David Hall, Meal Site Supervisor Carol Westhaver and Meal Site Assistant Esther Palardy.

In March, all of the progress made in the expansion of programs, activities and services at the Georgetown Senior Community Center were significantly interrupted as the building closed as a result of the President's declaration of a National Emergency, the Governor's declaration of a Statewide Emergency, and the Town's order to move to a Public Health Emergency Level 3 protocol. At this time, the Georgetown Senior Community Center remains closed although the COA staff returned to the offices in July. Although the building remains closed to the public, the COA continues to be busy with person-centered care. The pandemic has highlighted the need for essential services and the benefit of the strong community ties between the COA and consumers in Georgetown. Since the Senior Center closed to the public in March, the COA staff worked remotely and made 1,272 wellbeing phone calls to 155 individuals through the end of the fiscal year. Case management has increased to include 283 units of service to 155 people. Until the COA staff returned to the offices in July, application assistance was completed outside homes and often on consumer front stairs. Currently, we are able to complete fuel assistance or food resource applications by appointment outside the Senior Center meeting at two benches and a table that have been staged under our front entrance. Our Tai Chi instructor was able to begin teaching Tai Chi on Zoom. Our Yoga and Strength Training Instructor taped exercise classes for broadcast on the Town's Cable TV station. Local Cable TV also broadcast some nutrition

programs and cooking segments provided by our dietician with Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley along with information services taped by myself as well as our Veterans Services' Director.

In partnership with Elder Services of Merrimack Valley (ESMV), we continued to deliver monthly 30 Elder Brown Bag food packages to elder households throughout the shut-down. ESMV also continued to deliver Meals on Wheels and acted quickly to add consumers per our referral to the program. During the shut-down the COA Van continued to provide people with grocery shopping and other essential errands (Post Office, banks, pharmacies) twice per week. Initially the service was limited to one person at a time with the driver cleaning the van before and after the ride. Currently, the service has been expanded to include two riders well distanced on the van. The COA's SHINE Counselor and Veterans' Services Director continues to schedule telephone appointments.

As a demonstration of true community spirit during difficult times, the COA received wonderful donations to the COA Food Pantry allowing the staff to make deliveries to individuals as needed. The COA also received both donated fabric and disposable face masks and continues to deliver those per request. The COA also continues to lend durable medical equipment, delivering to individual homes. The equipment is cleaned before it is delivered, then cleaned after it is returned and quarantined for three days before it is lent again.

After staff returned to the office in July, we were able to return to producing our monthly newsletter, which includes a variety of resources and information. During the shutdown, I created and posted an electronic version of the newsletter on the Town's website which included a variety of resources related to the pandemic. Following the staff's return to the office, the COA began a Grab and Go Lunch Program with Elder Services of Merrimack Valley which has allowed the COA to connect with an additional demographic in the community. Along with a nutritious lunch, the program has provided additional outreach and socialization opportunities as some lunches are delivered and others are picked up outside the Senior Center. Although it is a very different way of providing services than we have experienced in the past, I feel that we are addressing needs and providing people with a high level of support and care during an uncertain and difficult time.

As a result of the pandemic and the loss of 3.5 months of programs and activities at the Georgetown Senior Community Center, the number of duplicated individuals served by COA programs and services decreased from 11,695 in FY 19 to 10,180 in FY20. Until the shut-down occurred in March, the COA had seen a steady 10-30 percent increase in monthly programs and activities. The increase in the duplicated elder count previous to the shut-down illustrates the success of housing all COA programs and services in one facility. As people arrive to participate in one activity, they were able to see other programs underway and consider further involvement. With more access to staff and confidential meeting areas, participants are comfortable in seeking services and asking for information regarding the more complex services. Until the shut-down in March, the COA also saw unduplicated non-elders seeking services such as support and assistance with food resources, fuel assistance, and transportation as well as case management support for complex clients living with a variety of physical and psycho/social needs. The increase in services to both demographics provides evidence that COA is often the only social

service agency in the community and functions as a gateway to other services for both elders and non-elders.

As an example of community partnership and grass-roots effort, the Trustees of the Perley Free School again provided a fuel assistance program to local residents who experience difficulty with heating costs. In addition to the money that is used to fund scholarships for Georgetown graduates and alumnae, the Trustees oversee a small endowment to aid Georgetown residents facing financial hardships. Concerned for people who may have difficulty with heating costs, the Trustees continued the plan for a limited heating assistance program for a seventh year. Often filling the gap for people whose income might be slightly higher than the limits required by Community Action and other programs, the Trustees provided one individual with heating assistance during FY20.

The COA's continued partnership with a local elder law attorney Elaine Dalton has allowed the COA the opportunity to provide a monthly elder law consultation program. With questions regarding elder law, estate planning, health care proxies and advance directives, the program provides elders with resources and information about the next steps to take. In FY20, the program served 15 unduplicated individuals.

The support of Crosby's Marketplace, a local grocery store, as a sponsor for our monthly Men's Breakfast program further illustrates the strength of the COA's partnerships within the community. Along with a nutritious breakfast for the participants, speakers are planned for the monthly program. Topics range from health and wellness, Medicare, retirement, Veterans' issues, current events, town government, home and personal safety, and local history. Averaging 20 men per month, we served a total of 129 men during the seven breakfasts that were able to be offered in FY20. The group ranges in age from 58 years to 95 years and includes several World War II and Korean War veterans. Until the shut-down, the program had enjoyed good participation from men in the community, with new participants joining the group since we moved into the new Georgetown Senior Community Center three years ago. Not only does the breakfast program provide participants with the opportunity to share a nutritious meal with friends, but it also provides the COA with an opportunity to develop relationships with men in the community. Often uncomfortable with group participation, men represent an underserved population. As a result of the Men's Breakfast program, we have been able to identify and address specific needs for individual men but we have also seen participants establish friendships with each other that extend into other areas of their lives. The group misses the opportunity to meet on a monthly basis and we continue to include the participants in wellbeing calls.

Before the shut-down occurred in March, participation in the income tax preparation program available through the Association for the Advancement of Retired People (AARP) was also on the rise. During the six weeks that we were able to provide the program, three volunteer Tax Aides prepared state and federal tax returns for 77 unduplicated individuals. The preparers also served 7 unduplicated non-elders in FY20. Along with income tax preparation, the Tax Aides provide participants with information regarding the state's Circuit Breaker Tax Credit and helped resolve individual issues with the state Department of Revenue including requests for additional verification from elders which often occurs as a result of elders filing the Circuit Breaker Tax Credit. When an AARP income tax preparation site was able to open in a nearby town in June

and July, COA staff called consumers whose appointments had been cancelled, triaged the consumer needs and referred them to the income tax preparation site.

A continued partnership with the Georgetown School Department has allowed the COA to further expand programs and activities available to local elders within the community. This year, a Community Service Program at the Penn Brook Elementary School provided holiday cards for Meals and Wheels consumers as well as Senior Center participants at three different holidays. Pre-school students created centerpieces for holiday meals. Students at the Penn Brook Elementary School organized and gathered several deliveries of donated food for the COA Marketplace. As another intergenerational opportunity, 22 elders attended a high school concert program and holiday breakfast in December. In February, the Culinary Arts Department at Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School prepared and served a special Valentine's lunch for 59 elders at the Georgetown Senior Community Center. Along with the very fine cuisine, the special event provides students and elders an opportunity to share and socialize.

The Georgetown and Merrimac Councils on Aging continue to share an eight-passenger van as part of a regional transportation plan. Funded with a grant from the state Department of Transportation's Mobility Assistance Program, the van is leased from the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA) and provides a vital link to needed services for elders and disabled individuals in Georgetown and Merrimac. To support independence and the goal of aging in place, the COA van traveled 3,515 miles in FY20 providing 13 individuals with 96 weekly shopping trips. Before the shut-down in March, the COA van provided 23 elders with 52 social recreational outings to shopping areas, museums and other recreational areas.

Providing elders with transportation to medical appointments, four volunteer drivers serving through Northern Essex Elder Transportation (NEET), Inc. supplied 8 elders with 17 round-trip out-of-town medical appointments located in Salem, North Andover, Newburyport, Amesbury, Beverly, Lawrence, Ipswich, Wenham Peabody, Danvers, Haverhill, Rowley, Georgetown and Groveland before the program had to close in March. The four volunteer drivers with the NEET program donated approximately 66.5 hours driving a total of 745 miles to provide the 8 elders with transportation to their medical appointments during the first nine months of FY20. In addition to the challenge of aging volunteers, the safety concerns during the pandemic will have an impact on drivers and consumers connected with the NEET program. However, the transportation service continues to be meaningful to those served as well as to the volunteers who provide the service.

To further address elder transportation needs, the COA staff also provides elders with information and referrals to the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority's (MVRTA) Ring and Ride transportation service. Using wheelchair lift-equipped MVRTA vehicles, the Ring and Ride program provides Georgetown residents with free curb-to-curb transportation to anywhere in Amesbury, Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen, Newbury/Byfield, Newburyport, North Andover and West Newbury as well as to the Rowley Commuter Rail Station and Market Basket. Fortunately, the MVRTA program was able to continue service during the pandemic's shut-down period. The COA staff also provides clients with information and referrals to the MVRTA's Medi-Ride Medical Service (currently on-hold) as well as the Mass Health Transportation Program, if eligible.

Until the shut-down the COA's weekly exercise, recreation, and game programs along with the meal site, cultural events, health and community education were all seeing significant increases in participation again. Along with weekly yoga, strength training, Tai Chi, and individual use of fitness equipment, a dance class, hybrid fitness class and walking club all saw good success and increased participation. As a result of the new and expanded fitness opportunities, the overall statistics showed an increase in duplicated elders participating on a monthly basis until the March shut down. More individual elders spent more time participating in programs and activities on a weekly basis until that time. Participation in COA Recreation and Socialization programs was also on the increase with additional programs such as Lunch and Learn Series and Armchair Travel demonstrating that the Senior Center continues to address needs that were unmet previously before the Senior Center was finished and opened to the public.

A continued connection with Emmaus, Inc. of Haverhill allows the 4-member doll-making group to create hand-sewn dolls for children living in local emergency shelters. Most of the fabric and stuffing material needed for the program is donated by individuals within the community. This year, we delivered 91 dolls to the program's family shelter in Haverhill before both programs had to close to the public in March. In addition, the COA's knitting group knit 206 hats for both children and adults served by Emmaus. The relationship with Emmaus has brought real meaning and purpose to the doll-making and knitting groups and the relationship continues to be a benefit to the participants as well as to the recipients of the dolls.

Until the shut-down in March, a SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) Counselor met with people on a monthly basis to discuss health insurance questions and concerns. During the shut-down and continued pandemic, the SHINE Counselor continued to provide consumers with health insurance information and support by telephone. The SHINE Counselor and COA Director often work together to provide clients with a higher level of service, sometimes meeting together or separately to assist clients with health insurance, prescription drug insurance or to provide assistance in completing state or Federal program applications. The meetings often lead to additional outreach opportunities for the COA with the clients. During the past year, the SHINE counselor and COA Director met with 66 unduplicated elders providing assistance with Medicare, Medigap policies, prescription drug plans and other health insurance issues. The COA has continued to see an increase in the number of younger elders seeking supplementary health insurance information as they reach 65 years and plan health insurance for retirement. This trend provides evidence to support the theory that a steadily increasing elder population within the community will generate a greater demand for services within the community.

Although the program has been on hold since the emergency orders in March, the monthly blood pressure clinics and annual flu clinic led by the Town's Board of Health all saw steady and stable participation with 24 unduplicated elders served at the monthly blood pressure clinics, a slight increase from the 23 unduplicated elders served in FY19 that would have continued forward. Forty-two elders were served at the annual flu clinic, an increase from the 39 individuals served in FY 19. Five non-elders were also served at the monthly blood pressure clinic and 10 were served at the annual flu clinic. Continuing during the pandemic and shut-down, the COA's Durable Medical Lending Program loaned 61 pieces of medical equipment to 39 unduplicated

elders this year, an increase from the 31 unduplicated elders served during the last full year in FY18. Five pieces of durable medical equipment were loaned to three non-elders this past year.

Both the Georgetown Police and Fire Departments continue to provide important safety programs. The Georgetown Fire Department successfully applied for a grant program that allowed the purchase and installation of a number of Lock Boxes and Smoke Detectors throughout the community. In FY20, the Lock Box Program served 7 elders. A grant for the new fiscal year is in place and the program will continue. Before the Senior Center was closed in March, both the Georgetown Police and Fire Departments presented community education programs at the Senior Center providing participants with important safety and consumer protection information. The community education programs are often televised allowing the information to reach a greater portion of the community.

Although the COA office was closed for more than three months from mid-March to mid-July, staff continued to retrieve and return telephone calls remotely from their homes. During the past year, the COA received 2,271 telephone calls and requests for information, assistance and referrals from elders this year. Responding to requests for support and assistance with food resources, fuel assistance, transportation as well as support for complex clients living with a variety of physical and psycho/social needs, the COA served 242 unduplicated elders and 472 duplicated elders, a respective 46 and 33 percent increase from the 166 duplicated individuals and 355 duplicated elders served with case management and advocacy in FY19. The 33 percent increase in the duplicated elders served this year supports the position that the Senior Center will continue to see more older adults in need of support, especially as the pandemic continues. In providing case management services, the COA maintains a confidential client file with emergency contact information on each elder served as well as ongoing progress notes on specific elders who receive case management services. With the closure of the Senior Center, home visits have been critical in evaluating and assessing consumer wellness. As the staff returned to the office in July, outdoor appointments have been possible for application assistance and other supports. In addition to home visits and office appointments, ongoing client support is provided with daily reassurance calls to frail and homebound elders. In FY20, 1,183 reassurance/wellbeing calls were made to 367 elders, a dramatic 44 percent increase as a result of the pandemic. To offer additional outreach within the community, the COA Outreach Worker and I wrote 60 sympathy, get well, thank you and thinking of you notes to local elders and family members.

In the first 9 months of FY20, the COA's monthly newsletter was mailed or delivered to 6,374 households. When the pandemic and emergency orders led to the closing of the COA offices and Senior Center, I wrote and posted an electronic version of the newsletter that provided the public with important resources and services related to the pandemic. To better reflect the focus and mission of the Council on Aging and the Georgetown Senior Community Center, the name of the newsletter from "A Few Gray Hairs" to "Living Well Together." In addition to mailing or delivering the newsletter to public locations, the newsletter is updated each month on the Town's website. To further strengthen the COA's community outreach, I continue to write press releases for local newspapers and cable television and update the Town's website and Facebook page on a frequent basis. Along with posting information on the Cable TV community bulletin board, the Cable TV station has continued to broadcast previously recorded programs on the local Cable TV community access station, allowing information related to elder programs and services to

reach a greater audience within the Town during the continued pandemic. This year, four local newspapers published more than 40 press releases, feature stories, photographs and letters to the editor publicizing COA programs and activities.

Based on state and local demographic information, I anticipate that the Georgetown COA and Georgetown Senior Community Center will continue to see an increase in the demand for services to support elders living in the community as a result of the increase in elder population. According to the U.S. Census, the population of elders over the age of 60 years has increased to a total of 1,427, a 54 percent increase since 2000. However, the 2020 local residents' age list shows that 2,062 elders over the age of 60 live in Georgetown, which represents 24 percent of the town's population. The local demographic information supports the population projections presented by the UMass Donahue Institute of Economic and Public Policy Research Institute which estimates that the elder population in Georgetown will increase to 2,158 in 2020 and 2,922 in 2030. Each month prior to the pandemic, growth was noted in the Georgetown COA statistics. Following the shut-down in March, an analysis of FY20 statistics found that the growth in COA services and programs was primarily seen in case management, SHINE, health and wellness, as well as case management services that assist in maintaining elder independence. The analysis provides evidence to support the important role that the Council on Aging and Georgetown Senior Community Center play in maintaining the safety, wellness and independence of older adults living in the community. When more of the public spaces in the community are able to reopen and resume new levels of activity, the Georgetown COA anticipates future growth in programs and activities as well as the supportive services offered at the Georgetown Senior Community Center.

The Friends of the Council on Aging group continue to increase community support and raise awareness for the COA's mission of serving elders and their families in the community. Along with raising "friends" for the COA, the on-going clothing and textile collection bin located at the Perley School has raised funds for Council on Aging programs and services. The group has been active in supporting and helping to facilitate programs such as the Women's Breakfast, socialization activities and special teas when the Georgetown Senior Community Center is open. The COA donation account has also gratefully received several gifts from residents and participants which have been used to support COA programs and activities.

The COA thanks the Kiwanis, the Georgetown School Department, Georgetown Cultural Council, Crosby's Marketplace, the Trustees of the Perley Free School, Nunan Florist and Greenhouses, the Friends of the Georgetown Council on Aging, as well as the Town departments including the Georgetown Housing Authority, and the Georgetown Police and Fire Department for their continued support during the past fiscal year. With deep appreciation, the COA thanks the more than 60 volunteers who serve as board members, volunteer drivers, program assistants, newsletter production crew, office support and volunteers during special events when the Georgetown Senior Community Center is open. Providing the Georgetown COA with more than 3,000 hours of volunteer service this past fiscal year, an estimated value of \$63,000, their hours of service are a valuable asset as well as a significant savings to the town. Not only are they a valuable resource and support to the COA, but they make a real and tangible difference in the lives they touch. Their support is essential to the COA's mission of serving elders and others in the community.